



SUBMITTED PHOTO

TANNER'S MESSAGE TO HIS GRANDDADDY

Master Sgt. Barry Bufkin of Decatur is a member of the Mississippi Air National Guard's 238th Air Support Operations Squadron. He left home Jan. 26 for deployment in Iraq; he is scheduled to return in either July or September. Here is "Tanner Man's" message to his grandfather: "I wanted you to know that I love you and miss you a lot. I can't wait for you to come home ... We always think about you and we know you are thinking about us, too. Thank you for serving our country during these times. Please be safe where you are and know that I love you so much, Granddaddy. Here is a picture of us together. I have the same picture so when I get to missing you real bad, I look at it and of course smile — because that's what I do best! ... I think you are the greatest! Take care and I will see you soon!"

Dear Uncle Sam ...

This letter was submitted by Eric Marshall, 12, a seventh-grader at Magnolia Middle School. Eric is writing to his Uncle Sam Roundtree, a lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force.

How are you doing? I'm a student at Magnolia Middle School. I live in Meridian and your wife, Gloria, is my auntie. I'm Erica's oldest child.

Thanks for all of your hard work fighting, but I have a few questions. When will this all be over? I'm afraid that Bush will get us killed and might send you back over there. Do you even like what Bush is doing? I certainly don't. Make sure you continue to do a great job.

Do you like being a soldier? I'm glad to know that you're fighting for our country. Is life hard in Iraq? Every time we turn on the news, we hear about a soldier getting killed. I love the job you and your troops are doing in Iraq. Tell the whole family in South Carolina I love them, and I love you too.



Marshall

Eric

Janis Galatas is the district clerk for the Lauderdale County Soil & Water Conservation District. Her husband, Sgt. Norris Galatas, is a member of the Mississippi Army National Guard's 150th Combat Engineer Battalion — and she is a member of the unit's Support Platoon Readiness Group.

By Janis Galatas
special to The Star

When people in Meridian hear "National Guard," the Mississippi Air National Guard's 186th Air Refueling Wing at Key Field immediately comes to mind.

They are a vital resource to this community and I am very proud of them. My brother, Bruce Williams, is a crew chief out there.

What most Meridianites don't know is that the Mississippi Army National Guard is out there, too. Just before you reach the gate at Key Field, on the right, the G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery National Guard Armory houses two Army Guard units — the 185th Aviation Company G and the Headquarters Company for the 150th Combat Engineer Battalion.

Combat engineers are sort of like the Army's handymen; they can build, tear down, dig up, blow up or hook up most anything. They have their own equipment and men to operate it — bulldozers, big monster trucks, explosives, infantry. You name it, the combat engineers can do it.

Boosting morale

The mission of the 150th Combat Engineer Battalion is to support U.S. Marines as needed at their forward operation bases throughout Iraq as the country rebuilds and struggles to maintain its freedom.

Our soldiers should be gone for about a year.

That brings me to the 150th's Family Readiness Group. We plan to send care packages every month to keep up morale. We really should be visible in the community and not let people forget that our soldiers are gone and won't see their families for a year.

Most folks don't realize it takes almost \$15,000 a year to keep supplies, care packages and "happys" going to more than 100 soldiers. Most Family Readiness Groups have had to purchase steel



PHOTO BY STEVE GILLESPIE / THE MERIDIAN STAR

SO, TELL US HOW YOU REALLY FEEL ...

Janis Galatas's desk reflects her support for troops deployed overseas. Her husband, Sgt. Norris Galatas, serves in the 150th Combat Engineer Battalion of the Mississippi Army National Guard. Janis' office is at the USDA Service Center, 2412 Seventh St. in Meridian. She is selling ribbon magnets for \$5 each to raise money to send care packages to her husband's platoon while they are in Iraq. Janis' supervisor, Lamar Gunter, is a member of the 186th Air Refueling Wing of the Mississippi Air National Guard. "He understands deployment and the need for families and communities to support our troops," she said. "This is why my desk looks like a recruiter's desk."

plating, body armor or radios for their troops — and we were no different.

In this day and time, people have forgotten what it is like to have a family member away at war, fighting not for the flag, or freedom, or American values — but fighting each minute to stay alive, to come home to their family, or if they are single, to come home and start one.

Civilian soldiers

What most people don't realize, too, is that the National Guard is made up of "civilian soldiers."

Our soldiers are bankers, teachers, coaches, store managers, truck drivers and factory workers. They had to train hard at Camp Shelby and Fort Irwin to learn to be soldiers, the kind of soldiers to see combat in wartime.

We wives, moms, girlfriends and fiancées had to learn to be soldiers' wives, moms, girlfriends and fiancées. This time it is not another drill, or a natural disaster to clean up. Our soldiers went to war. Some of

them may not come home.

We get so used to seeing our guys in their uniforms for monthly guard drills, that we forget why they are drilling.

What you can do

My point is this — instead of Family Readiness Groups of deployed units having to look for ways to raise money, communities around these deployed units should jump in there and assume all responsibilities for these troops.

Care packages, special "thank you" notes from the communities, "happys" every month, news from home — this is what keeps up morale.

St. Patrick School and Poplar Springs Elementary School made Veterans Day "thank you" cards for the HHC 150th and every soldier broke down when they received their package stuffed with "thank yous" from children ages 5-10 — even tough old Sgt. Galatas.

A soldier is told from Day 1 that in the Army he is expendable. This is a given that he readily accepts. What really matters to him is that the

150TH COMBAT ENGINEERS

The members of the 150th Combat Engineer Battalion at Key Field are called the Dixie Sappers; "sapper" is a French word for ditch-digger. Their motto is "Essayons," which means "Let us try." The 150th is part of the 155th Separate Armor Brigade of Tupelo, now called the 155th Brigade Combat Team.

people back home don't forget him and that, in his hometown, he is cherished.

I am proud of our soldiers in the 150th and I'm sure Meridian is ready to support them in any way necessary. I am proud to be a soldier's wife, but I am not too proud to ask for help.

Meridian, here's your chance.

Heart-wrenching stories from Iraq

Dorothy Dixon lives in Butler, Ala. Her "Bragging Rights" submission is about her son, Staff Sgt. Samuel D. Dixon of the Alabama Army National Guard's 1166th Military Police Company, based in Thomasville. Samuel Dixon joined the unit in 1985.

By Dorothy Dixon
special to The Star

My grandson, Staff Sgt. Sam Dixon, has served in both wars in Iraq.

During Operation Desert Storm in the early 1990s, his company was attached to the 1st Infantry Division. The

1166th Military Police flew into Kuwait to serve in the war against Iraq on March 28, 2003.

While in Kuwait, Sam and his unit were assigned the task of guarding three-quarters of a billion dollars in American money that had been confiscated during combat. For three days, the unit provided security while the money was being counted.

One month later, Sam and unit were stationed at Baghdad International Airport ... For about two months, his division worked with a criminal investigations division that was assigned to explore mass graves just outside Mosul.

According to Sam, they used picks and shovels to uncover

the graves, some of which were decades old. Sam describes the heart-wrenching stories of Iraqi people who came out to them and begged them to find their relatives who hadn't been seen in years. He related stories told by family members about seeing their loved ones go into a local "courthouse" — never to



Dixon

be seen again.

Many of those missing Iraqis were uncovered as they dug out the mass graves. "Emotionally you can never prepare for that kind of experience," Sam said.

Sam came home to Butler, Ala., in April 2004 after being on active duty for 14 months. He makes drill each month at Thomasville, Ala. Sam will have 20 years of service with the 1166th the summer of 2005.

He has two beautiful daughters, Amber, 11, and Brandi, 7. Sam works for Georgia Pacific Corp. at Naheola, Ala. His parents are Bill and Dot Dixon, his girlfriend is Laurette Jenkins. His children are very proud of Staff Sgt. Samuel D. Dixon.